

SEASONAL INFLUENZA VACCINE (“Flu shot”)

What is the seasonal influenza vaccine?

The seasonal influenza vaccine protects against viruses that cause influenza (flu). Each year, scientists monitor the global spread of flu and decide which flu strains will likely cause the most illness during flu season. Those strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year, so each year the vaccine is different.

The vaccine does not protect against other viruses or bacteria that cause colds or stomach illness, such as stomach flu. Several influenza vaccines are approved for use in Canada each year.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?

Getting immunized each year is the best way to protect against influenza infection, a serious and sometimes fatal disease. When you and your family are immunized, you help protect others as well.

How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given as an injection into the upper arm in older children and adults; and into the thigh in infants.

Who does the health system provide seasonal influenza vaccine for?

Seasonal influenza vaccine is available free of charge to the following New Brunswick residents by many different immunization providers through a variety of programs:

Adults and children with chronic health conditions:

- cardiac or pulmonary disorders (including bronchopulmonary dysplasia, cystic fibrosis and asthma);
- diabetes mellitus and other metabolic diseases;
- cancer, immune compromising conditions (due to underlying disease and/or therapy);
- renal disease;
- anemia or hemoglobinopathy;
- neurologic or neurodevelopment conditions. These include seizure disorders, febrile seizures and isolated developmental delay in children and neuromuscular, neurovascular, neurodegenerative, neurodevelopmental conditions and seizure disorders in adults, but excludes migraines and neuropsychiatric conditions without neurological conditions;
- conditions that compromise the management of respiratory secretions and are associated with an increased risk of aspiration;
- morbid obesity (BMI \geq 40); and
- children and adolescents (ages 6 months to 18 years) undergoing treatment for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid, because of the potential increase of Reye’s syndrome associated with influenza.

People of any age who are residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities;

People \geq 65 years of age;

Healthy children 6 months to 18 years of age;

All pregnant women;

Aboriginal people;

People capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk:

- household contacts (adults and children) of individuals at high risk of influenza-related complications (whether or not the individual at high risk has been immunized);
- household contacts of infants <6 months of age;
- members of a household expecting a newborn during the influenza season;
- household contacts of children 6 months to 59 months;
- health care workers.

All healthy persons aged 19-64 years are also encouraged to receive the influenza vaccine.

Who should not receive the vaccine?

Anyone who has:

- had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of influenza vaccine, or any component with the exception of egg, of the vaccine or its container;
- developed Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of getting any influenza vaccine. GBS is a rare condition that can result in weakness and paralysis of the body's muscles.

Children younger than six months should not get the influenza vaccine because it is not licensed and not known to be effective for this age group.

NOTE -Egg allergy is no longer considered a reason not to get the flu vaccine.

What are the possible side effects of the vaccine?

As with any vaccine, side effects can occur. Those most common may include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. In some people, symptoms can include mild fever, headache and aching muscles starting six to 12 hours after getting the vaccine and lasting about one to two days.

Rare side-effects: As with any vaccine, there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. For this reason it is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. If symptoms occur after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.**

Any unexpected or serious reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health-care provider.

What can be done for common side effects to the vaccine?

- Applying a cold compress at the injection site may reduce discomfort.
- For discomfort and fever, you may take or give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Advil) may also be used following the manufacturers instructions.

NOTE -Aspirin (ASA) should NOT be given to children younger than 18 years due to its link to Reye's syndrome.

What else you need to know

- Please inform the immunization provider if you or your child have any health problems or allergies.
- Children six months to less than 9 years who have never had an influenza vaccine need to have two doses at least four weeks apart.
- Your immunization provider will provide you with a record of immunization. Please keep this record in a safe place and bring it with you to each immunization appointment.
- Individuals 16 years and older can give their own consent. Children younger than 16 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.
- The vaccine given by injection cannot give you "the flu" because it does not contain a live virus.

For more information please visit your health care provider or check the website at: www.gnb.ca/flu

Useful websites:

- Government of New-Brunswick www.gnb.ca/health
- Public Health Agency <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza.html>
- Public Health Agency <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>